

# WHY BAT HANGS UPSIDE DOWN

(LAKE ALBERT, THE CONGO)

*No character fault is highlighted more often in nature stories than greed. Here, the greedy party, Lightning, isn't so much punished directly (how, after all, would one go about punishing lightning?), but rather is spurned for all time by Bat, one of the wisest and most respected of the animals.*



LONG TIME AGO when Bat was king of his country, he and his wife and many children came and went with all the pomp and prestige that royalty affords. His kraals were filled with goats and cows, his food baskets overflowed, and as for his chickens, well, who could even begin to count them? In the evenings the cooks prepared fine, rich dishes for the family, all with one kind of meat or another, which is in itself testimony to just how wealthy Bat really was.

One day while out surveying his kingdom, Bat was hailed by a strange voice. It was Lightning, king of another realm high above the earth, who'd come to propose that the two rulers draw up a treaty of kinship, a pact of blood-brotherhood to ensure peaceful relations for all times. Well, Bat was a lover of peace and good intention, and such a gesture moved him. He ordered his cooks to prepare the grandest of feasts for his guest, and by that evening the tables in his house were heavy with dishes that most people would

think themselves fortunate even to dream about. Partway through dinner Lightning's gaze fell on a beautiful serving platter, a royal heirloom handed down to Bat from a long line of ancestors. "I tell you, my friend," Lightning said, "that platter is the most stunning thing I've ever seen. I simply must have it." Bat made a sweeping gesture, pointing to all the fine things that filled his home. "Take anything else you see, my friend, but that platter is part of the royal house. Truly, it is not mine to give."

Of course, most people would have understood such a thing, how some possessions are simply beyond giving away. But not Lightning. He took Bat's refusal as a great insult, and demanded that Bat turn the platter over at once! When Bat refused, Lightning stomped out of the house and rose to the sky, where he sent down fierce bolts of fire. In a matter of minutes Bat's house and all that he owned were destroyed.

Bat stood heartbroken beside the ashes, grief-stricken by the loss of his home, of his chickens and cows and goats. And when the grief ripened and fell away, Bat was left with only anger and contempt for Lightning's greedy ways. It was then that King Bat made his famous declaration. From that moment on he and his children and all their offspring would turn their backs to the sky, would hang beneath trees and from the roofs of caves, facing earth—a sign of their great displeasure at Lightning's awful behavior.